Controlling Blackgrass on an organic arable farm: Our Approach.

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- Organic Farmers and Contractors.
- 3200 acres in West Suffolk - 1700 acres of this under CFA's.
- Attention to detail key to the success of our business and that of our contract farms.
- Predominantly Hanslope series chalky boulder clay.
- Wheat, Barley, Oats, Beans, Spelt and Quinoa.
- 500 breeding NZ Romney ewes, first lambs due 2016.
- 2 full time staff plus casuals at peak periods.

Knowledge is power: Know your enemy!

- Comprehensive research carried out by Rothamsted Research available on-line.
- CROPROTECT website and App a new hub of knowledge, easily accessible on the go.
- Knowledge sharing between farmers is vital. Share experiences at local discussion groups and Field Labs.
- Knowledge sharing online, many interesting organic and conventional farmers on Twitter from this country and further afield.

Drainage and Compaction

Blackgrass is favored by water retentive soils.

- Maintenance of drainage systems allows water to leave the soil profile. Ditching and mole draining vital.

- Controlled Traffic Farming reduces the spread of compaction, leading to better water infiltration through the soil profile into maintained drainage systems.

  >80% trafficed on previous random traffic system.

  <20% on current 9m CTF system.

Rotation

- 80% of BG germinates in the autumn.
  We have moved from all winter cropping to 50/50 winter/spring.

- 70-80% reduction of seed bank per year of fallowing/ley.
  We have increased the length of our ley period to 2-3 years (Weed pressure dependent).

- Competitive cultivars in low fertility positions to ensure adequate competition with BG.
  We are growing Oats/Barley in second and last cereal slots.


Winter Wheat – High BG population


Spring Wheat - Clean

Sheep, Making longer leys pay!

- Introduction of NZ Romney sheep provides income from longer ley periods.
- Good management of grazing can reduce/eliminate BG seed return.
- Increased arable yields, lamb sales, reduced costs!
- ORC trials funded by the Duchy Future Farming Programme, investigating the effect of grazing winter wheat in the spring before stem extension as a tool for reducing BG seed return.

Cultivations and Drilling

- Ploughing can reduce BG plant numbers by burying freshly shed seeds to a depth from which they cannot germinate and bringing up soil with lower blackgrass populations. BUT…You have to get it right!

- Stale seedbeds before drilling, but select points to make sure you get a good kill.

- Late drilling aids control, but risky on clay. Better with CTF?

In-crop Weed Control

- Inter-row hoeing provides good levels of blackgrass control. We are using the first System Cameleon drill/hoe system within the UK made by Swedish company Gothia Redskap.

- Hoeing followed by harrow-comb weeding to ensure separation of weed from soil and to provide cultivation within seed rows.

- Weed Surfer possible late season, but must take care when flag leaf or ear is out!

Where to next?

- Blind Weeding.
- Use of reduced surface tillage at targeted areas in the rotation.
- Combine based chaff management systems.

Uprooted Blackgrass on surface.

Germinated winter beans OK below!

Thank you for listening!

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